

# The Bethel Courier.

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BETHEL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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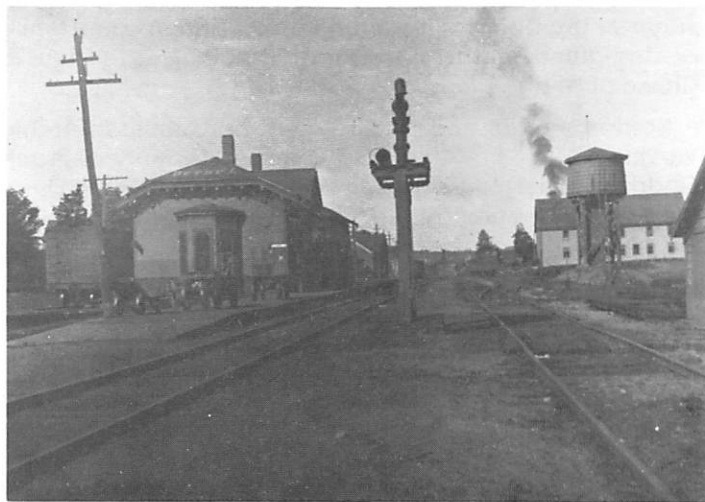
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Bethel Railroad Station on Railroad Street, ca. 1900

## RAILROAD STREET THROUGH THE YEARS by Geraldine S. Howe

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The history of Bethel's Railroad Street was originally presented at the November 1987 monthly meeting of the Society. It has been revised and updated for this issue. The author wishes to express her gratitude to all who shared their memories and/or photographs. The street is so named since it parallels the railroad tracks from Main Street to the intersection with Church Street. It was originally laid out in the 1850s.

**RAILROAD STATION** — The original station was built about 1851 by the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad. The 1858 Atlas indicates that the station may have been closer to the present railroad crossing than was later the case with the new Grand Trunk station erected in 1865. This building was apparently repaired and expanded in 1899 according to items in the *Oxford Democrat*. Water from the Bethel Water Company was installed at the depot in September 1890 and the water tank in the summer of 1896. In the fall of 1896 new sidings were added to be used by the corn shop and chair factory. About this time a railroad water tower was erected which lasted until the early decades of the twentieth century. Livestock sidings were also built and continued to be used for many years. During World War I and World War II the station saw increased use; plans were even developed to make Bethel a major railroad terminus during the 1940s. By the 1960s rail service in Bethel was on the decline and passenger service was terminated. The station was demolished by the Canadian National in 1968 and with its disappearance went one of the town's most famous landmarks.

(continued on next page)

From the newspapers it can be determined that at times the Bethel station was one of the busiest spots in town. In January 1886 the following was reported in the OXFORD DEMOCRAT: "Business is lively, especially near the railroad station. There are daily from three to six cars switched off and loading with pulp, timber and other productions of our woods. Besides this John S. Swan loads three cars a week with potatoes paying therefore 50 cents and 55 cents per bushel. They are hauled from the lakes, from Andover and all the surrounding country."

The station was also the scene of a minor disaster in June 1886: "A hog's head of molasses burst in the railroad station last week, all the sweets escaping except some sugar at the bottom. It went off on its own account while resting quietly in the store room. It belonged to Charles Chase of Upton."

Station agents and telegraphers here include Archie Verville, O. A. Pratt, John Plante, J. G. Auger, Frank Goddard, Charles Cornell, Chester Briggs, Wilbur Gammon, Larry Chenier, Albert Foy, Russell Graham, Phillips Brooks \_\_\_\_\_ Morse, and \_\_\_\_\_ Reid.

**LAUNDROMAT** — The site of the present laundromat was once the location of scales for measuring the weight of grain, hay, coal, etc. Ira Jordan who founded the store entered from Main Street had a grain store facing Railroad Street. From Jordan title for the property passed to his son Harry who operated the store for many years as well. Harry's son Elmon sold the property to Patrick and Gladys Grenier in 1963. The Greniers sold the premises to Fred and Dan Callahan in 1965. It was they who constructed the present laundromat building on the site. They sold the property to John Witter in 1971, who owns it today.

**BIG APPLE STORE** — This structure was built as a filling station by Edward N. Robertson in 1927. His son Frank was associated with him and later operated it for many years. He sold the property to Richard Young, who also operated a station on Main Street as well. Young sold the Railroad Street station to Albert Buck in 1946. From Buck it passed to the Callahan Brothers, who sold the premises to Charles Merrill in 1985. He had leased the site since the 1960s. Merrill sold the property to Ripley and Fletcher in 1988 and the Big Apple Store opened here in 1989. Among those who have worked here during the filling station era are Paul Chapman, Tom Kennagh, Arthur Mills, Homer Smith, Sr., Homer Smith, Jr., Bryce Yates, Gilbert Haines, Ed Deegan, Dan Davis, Larry Patterson, Maynard Morgan, Jim Dock, Allan Merrill, Chris Merrill, Carl Colby, Jeff Lyon, Mike Jodrey, Irving York, Herman Cummings, Ruel Chapman and George Nickerson.

**EARL HUTCHINSON HOUSE** — This ranch style house was built in 1974 by Earl Hutchinson who lives here today. It stands on the site of the building long known as "The Beehive", which was built prior to 1880 as it is listed on the ATLAS of that year as belonging to unmarried women by the name of Curtis. It was sold by New England Deaconess Association for \$1200 to Agnes Hastings Straw (1837-1923) on October 4, 1903. Mrs. Straw sold the property to Newell S. Godwin. Etta Godwin later conveyed the premises to Niles Kellogg (1883-1955), who built in the 1930s a grocery and grain store on the corner facing Railroad Street. This business was acquired in 1955 by Ernest Buck (1887-1966), who continued the store operations (grain and groceries) before selling to Robert Billings, who

operated the business until the later 1960s. He acquired the "Beehive" from the Kellogg heirs and for several years rented the property before demolishing it. The store was razed about 1970.

**MARY LEIMBACH HOUSE** — This set of buildings goes back to the 1880s, probably built by John S. ("Potato John") Swan, who acquired the land from Henry L. Chapman in 1882. Swan apparently built the storage building (used by Stowell-McGregor and later by Hanover Dowel Company) across from this house on the other side of Railroad Street which can still be seen today. In 1883, "Potato John" shipped 40,000 bushels of spuds according to an item in the *Oxford Democrat*. He was described as "always having a smile on his countenance" and as "very congenial". Charles D. Atherton purchased the property of "Potato John" in 1903. From Atherton it was transferred to Howard F. Thurston in 1914. Ernest S. Buck acquired the premises from Tena M. Thurston in 1949. His widow Grace conveyed it to the present owner in 1977. Among the tenants who have lived here are Albert and Norma Buck, Reta Machias, Lawrence Winslow, Irving "Blackie" and Ruth Cummings. There was also a building near this house which was used by Niles Kellogg to store grain and by Ernest Bisbee for coal. Its origins are uncertain.

**LAWRENCE AND MARY ELLEN DAVIS HOUSE** — This house was long known as the "Burbank place." It was built before 1880 as it appears on the 1880 ATLAS, probably by Gustavus Burbank. Later owners have included Augustus and Ellen Burbank, Nelle Burbank and Ernest and Ina Mundt. Tenants have included Wilfred (Willie) and Neva Coolidge, Merton Brown, Elsie Douglass, Mary Cummings, Edward Deegan, Douglas Greenleaf and David Taylor.

**BETHEL HEALTH CENTER** - The Bethel Health Center (opened in 1986) was remodeled from the former A & P Store built here in the 1960s. Also established here in the 1960s was the liquor store. Both the A & P and the liquor store ceased operations in the 1970s. Lynn Bristol operated a carpet business here (Carpet Warehouse) before it became the property of the Northern Oxford County Health Service Council. The house on this site appears on the 1858 Atlas as "J. Holt." Presumably this was Jacob Holt, a carpenter, who married Hannah Watson of Norway. His son, the architect Thomas Holt, designed a number of buildings in Maine before his death at age 54 in 1889. He sold the premises for \$500 to William and Eliphalet Whitney in 1889, just a month before his death. The Whitney Brothers operated a monument business on Main Street (formerly Martha's Restaurant) for many years. From the Whitney family the house passed to James and Pauline Browne in 1953. They sold to Clinton and Jean Jenkins in 1960. Clinton Jenkins sold the premises to Frank Lowell who cut the trees in front of his house, demolished the buildings and built the parking lot and shopping center building. He sold the property to Walter and Mary Fischer of Dover, NH in 1966. From the Fischer family the property was transferred to Marilyn I. Bristol. From Bristol the property passed to Rochester Savings and Trust Company. The Health Center acquired it from Bankeast Savings and Trust in 1984. An eatery, the Bulldog Diner, was established in the former liquor store site by George and Danna Nicherson. They later sold the business to Harold Young. The last owners were the Wesley Aron family from Upton. After this business closed, the Bethel Railroad Museum was housed here until its collection was moved to Gorham, NH.



**ALBERT AND ROSE SUMNER HOUSE** — This house was probably built in the 1880s by Henry B. Flint, who sold the property to Lydia E. Parker for \$750 in 1887. She transferred it for the same amount to William Parker in 1889. From Parker it was conveyed to Harry E. Jordan in 1903; Jordan transferred it to Frank Abbott in 1926. Arthur Dudley was the next owner; he sold it to Leonard Sumner the same year he purchased it (1928). From Albert Sumner the property passed in 1951 to his wife Marguerite, mother of the present owner.

An Amoco gas station was opened next to this house by Jesse Chapman in 1931. Next to this was a lunchroom known as Maple Lunch. After this property was purchased by Charles and Mary Keoskie, the lunchroom was renamed The Snack Shop and operated by the new owners and Sadie Robertson. Charles and Mary Keoskie sold the property to Robert and Mary Billings in 1947. They added a back addition to the station and opened it as a sporting goods store and gun shop. They also built the present house. Later Gertrude Boyker lived here and she was followed by her granddaughter, Barbara Holt. Several others have lived here including Linwood and Mildred Lowell. The present tenants are Murray and Helen Cummings. The house is now owned by Albert Sumner; he razed the former gun shop building several years ago.

Across Railroad Street from this site was the Chamber of Commerce information booth operated by John Butts from 1939 to 1942. It was moved during World War II to Paradise and used as an observer station during 1942.

**CHARLES AND MARY KEOSKIE HOUSE** — The site of the Charles and Mary Keoskie house was once the property of Alfred and Lydia Parker. It was acquired by Bethel merchant Calvin Bisbee in 1902. He held the property until 1929 when he sold to Ellis G. Annis. From the Annis family the property passed to Jesse Chapman in 1930. He sold the premises to the present owner in 1946. The house was probably built about the turn of the century by Eben S. Kilborn. Among those who have resided here are Jesse and Eva Chapman, Roland and Jeanie Annis, the Albert Keniston family, Allen and Doris Walker, the Morse family, Harold and Iola Marshall, and James and Beatrice Brown.

**LELAND AND BARBARA BROWN HOUSE** — The house was built in the 1870s by Samuel D. Philbrook. Presumably it was acquired from Philbrook by Charles Calvin Farwell, a railroad worker. After Mr. Farwell's death in the 1920s the house passed to his sons Fred L. and H. Merton Farwell. Fred deeded his share of the premises to his brother H. Merton in 1925. His widow sold the property to Leland and Barbara Brown in 1955.

**GOULD ACADEMY HOUSE** — This house is believed to have also been built by Samuel D. Philbrook. He sold it to Alice R. Kelliher for \$1000 in 1891. In 1900 Bessie L.

#### EDITOR'S CORNER

Although every attempt is made to eliminate errors in the historical articles that appear in the COURIER, an occasional one does appear. In the fall 1989 issue on page 8 of Mary C. Keniston's article on Mill Hill, it should read Roscoe and Mabelle Andrews, not Tift. Several avid readers of the COURIER brought this mistake to my attention and I am grateful to them for doing so.

SRH

#### PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Few sounds are more evocative of memories than the plaintive whistle of a locomotive coming through a crossing on a quiet evening. My own recollections of trains go back to an excursion through the Colorado Rockies and the famous Moffat Tunnel. More recently I have made several European trips back and forth between Amsterdam and Brussels. For nearly everyone the railroad will mean a memory or feeling. Trains are an integral part of American history; they are woven into the fabric of our civilization and stand out clearly in our popular culture. In songs, in clubs and societies, and in various sites, the American love of "railroadiana" is recalled and preserved.

In Bethel, the coming of the railroad resulted in economic advantages, and the population shifted from Middle Intervale to the area known as Bethel Hill. Passenger trains brought summer visitors to Bethel hotels, inns and boarding houses; freight trains conveyed Bethel's forest and agricultural products to the cities in the south. In exchange Bethel obtained machinery and other essentials from various manufacturing centers.

Today competition from trucks and buses has reduced the railroad's share of business. Freight trains still pass through Bethel but tourists and skiers travel mostly by automobile. The watertank and station which served the railroad for many years in Bethel are now gone. Only the tracks, memorabilia and memories remain. Here and in much of the United States, the great age of railroads has passed. This is regrettable because in many parts of the world, rail service is still an efficient and convenient way of transporting people and products. I know that I am not alone in wishing for a revival of our once magnificent system of rail transportation.

Marvin Ouwinga

Martin acquired the property from Alice Kelliher for \$2000. Mrs. Martin sold the premises to Gardiner L. Brown in 1939. Brown sold to Gould Academy in 1956. For years he operated a service station on the corner of Church and Railroad streets; this was demolished in the 1960s. Barbara D. Brown also had a gift shop on the Elm Street side of this house in the 1950s. The building was moved down Church Street from a location beside what was then Cotton's Restaurant, then used as a shoe repair shop. After Barbara closed her gift shop the building was transferred to Paradise Street where it is today the home of Manning Chapman.

Railroad Street remains today what it has been throughout its history — a combination of commercial and residential structures. Gone however is the landmark that dominated the street for so many of its years — the depot. Also lost forever is the home of Bethel's noted architect Thomas Holt. But much survives to remind us daily of the importance of one of Bethel's busiest streets.

#### IN MEMORIAM

Florence S. Dyer, April 3, 1990  
Emeline Heath, May 3, 1990  
Karl Kraul, April 7, 1990  
Robert B. Marshall, January 15, 1990  
Jane Van Den Kerckhoven, April 29, 1990

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The Society maintains a selection of modestly priced gifts and historical publications. These may be ordered at the prices listed below. Maine residents should include 5% sales tax. Orders under \$10 should include \$1 for postage and handling; those over \$10 but under \$20 should include \$2 and all those over \$20 should include \$3 for postage and handling.

Moses Mason House Tile \$3.50  
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Moses Mason House Bethel Railroad Station  
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"Made in Bethel" 75¢  
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1880 Map of Entire Town (Bethel) \$2  
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Bethel Historical Society Calendar, 1989 \$6

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*Rodney and Geraldine Howe*

## MEMBER PROFILE

Among the most active volunteers of the Society are Rodney and Geraldine Howe of Bethel. Both are Bethel natives and graduates of Gould Academy. They are the parents of five children (including Society Director Stanley R. Howe) and grandparents of twelve. Now retired, they live on Mrs. Howe's 18th century ancestral farm just below Bethel Hill.

Rodney Howe, a retired plumber, has served the town as Selectman and as a member of the School and Budget committees. A Gold Sheath member of Alder River Grange, he is a dedicated volunteer for the East Bethel Church, the Middle Intervale Meeting House and the East Bethel Cemetery. His record of service to the Society is a lengthy one as well, including countless hours spent assisting with Indian Raid '81 and Sudbury Canada Days. He has also assisted in many ways from cutting dead trees to assembling newsletters. One of his most ambitious projects was restoring (with his son) the stone wall between the Society's property and that of the Bethel Inn.

Geraldine Howe has served on the Program Committee for the past sixteen years, including many years as chairman. She has also served as a guide in the museum since 1974 and plays an active role on the Garden and Grounds Committee. She has volunteered in many capacities from assembling newsletters to conducting street programs at Society meetings. Also active in the Grange and in East Bethel Community affairs, she has served most recently as president of the Middle Intervale Meeting House Society.

Life members of the Society, they are also generous donors to its endowment fund and its collections.



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#### BOOK NOTE

**A FIFIELD GENEALOGY: SOME DESCENDANTS OF WILLIAM FIFIELD OF IPSWICH AND NEWBURY, MASSACHUSETTS, AND HAMPTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE.** Compiled by Randall H. Bennett. Privately printed, 1989. Paper. \$25 plus tax and shipping.

Better known for his various publications pertaining to local history (e.g., *The History of Rumford in 1826* (1975) and *Sunday River Sketches: A New England Chronicle* (1977), both of which he edited and published) and the built environment (*Oxford County, Maine: A Guide to its Historic Architecture* (1987)), Randall H. Bennett, the Society's Curator of Collections, has now directed his research and writing talents to the area of genealogy in producing a detailed study of the descendants of the early New England pioneer William Fifield. Several years in preparation, this volume carries the story of the Fifields from the early seventeenth century to the 1980s, tracing some twelve generations of descendants throughout the northeast and many other parts of the country.

Clearly arranged in a numbering system used by both the *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* and the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, the book also lists all sources for facts stated, allowing future researchers to expand upon the information provided. Covering the children and grandchildren (when known) of Fifield daughters (data usually withheld from similar genealogies), Bennett's book is particularly rich in material for descendants of William Fifield who have resided in Maine and New Hampshire.

*A Fifield Genealogy* is without doubt the most extensive study of the American Fifield family ever published and utilizes a wide variety of sources, both published and

(continued on next page)

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(Book Note, continued from page 7)

unpublished. Especially useful were the writings of Martha Fifield Wilkins, whose Sunday River notes Bennett published in book form in 1977 (see above).

The soft-cover book, issued in a privately printed edition, contains an extensive bibliography, as well as an "every-name" index. A section on the Fifield name and its historical background is also included.

Those with an interest in obtaining copies of this well-researched volume should contact the author at P.O. Box 891, Bethel, ME 04217.

### **REFLECTIONS OF A HALF CENTURY (continued from the last issue)**

**By Leslie E. Davis**

I went to work for Mr. Ellery on October 1, 1924 and worked for him until May 1, 1925. I didn't particularly like chauffeuring as a job as there was too much time with nothing to do, but I did get a chance to get a little extra education. During part of that winter, Mr. Ellery and his wife went to Italy and while they were gone I was supposed to look after the mechanical equipment and plumbing at his house in Brookline and drive his cars (he had two Lincolns) to take his wife's sisters wherever they wanted to go. My family stayed in Bethel and I was able to get home for a weekend about two or three times during the winter; Marie also came to Brookline for a week in March. She took Kathryn, who was a year old with her; they came by train to Portland and I met them there with Mr. Ellery's Lincoln Coupe.

On one of my trips to Bethel for a weekend late in the winter while visiting at Herrick Bros. Co. Garage, I saw Al Herrick, who owned half the garage business with Arthur; he wanted to sell me his half interest. After considerable discussion, he agreed to sell me his half of the business for \$6000 payable \$1000 on May 1 and the balance \$1000 per year with interest at 6%. So on May 1, I finished working for

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William Ellery and came back to Bethel as half owner of the Herrick Bros. Co. in partnership with Arthur Herrick. The partnership was quite satisfactory, especially during the earlier years of its existence.

We paid ourselves \$150 a month and at the end of the year divided whatever profit we had made over what we needed in the business as working capital. Arthur's family was more expensive than mine, and during these years he had a new house built on Vernon Street, so by the year's end he had drawn ahead on the year-end dividend about all that was coming to him, while I was able, by being pretty economical, or possibly I should say stingy, to have all of mine due me.

*(To be continued in the next issue)*

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